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Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East

The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East

Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum*

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* The information contained in the addendum was received after the submission of the main report.

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III. Replies received from Governments

Israel

[24 September 2012]

In recent years, Israel has sought to lay the foundation for peace in the region based on a historical reconciliation, embodying the notions of compromise, mutual trust and respect, open borders and good-neighbourliness. The foundation for coexistence between Israel and its neighbours was laid in bilateral peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Israel still hopes that peace treaties will be reached with the Palestinians, as well as with other neighbouring countries in the region. In addition, after the Madrid Conference of 1991, Israel made a substantial effort to contribute to the success of the arms control and regional security talks in the framework of the multilateral track of the peace process. The arms control and regional security talks were the appropriate forum to promote confidence and address regional security issues and challenges. These talks were, unfortunately, discontinued by others in the region, instead of becoming an important channel for regional dialogue.

At present, no regional dialogue exists in the Middle East, nor is there a mechanism to develop confidence-building measures between the countries of the region. Embarking on a process which could result in modest arms control measures and the eventual establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems is therefore extremely complex. It raises many practical questions that emanate from the chronically unstable nature of the Middle East and the absence of a broader regional peace. It should also be noted that there exists no precedent for such a comprehensive zone free of weapons of mass destruction in other, less troubled parts of the world.

Despite this lack of progress, both regionally and globally, Israel attaches great importance to nuclear non-proliferation, and has made great efforts in recent years to abide by and respect global non-proliferation norms, including in the field of export controls and enhanced cooperation regarding the various supplier regimes.

These efforts constitute an important component of the overall effort to improve the regional security climate. It was in this spirit that Israel signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996 and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in 1995. In addition, in 2004 Israel adopted the Export and Import Order (Control over Chemical, Biological and Nuclear Exports). The Order prohibits the export of equipment, technology and services designated for weapons of mass destruction programmes, and establishes a control system for dual-use items in the nuclear, chemical and biological domain. The list of the controlled items is based on the lists established by the Australia Group and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. By adopting the Order, Israel implemented its policy of adherence to those export control regimes. Israel's export control legislation on missiles and related material reflects Israel's adherence to the Missile Technology Control Regime. It is incorporated in the 2008 Defense Export Control Act and in related secondary legislative instruments. Israel welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) and the extension of the mandate of the 1540 Committee, under the terms of Council resolution 1977 (2011).

The disturbing realities in the Middle East mandate a practical step-by-step approach, bearing in mind the ultimate goal of achieving peaceful relations and reconciliation among all the States in the region. This process, as has been demonstrated by the experience of all other regions in which a nuclear-weapon-free zone has been established, is inherently an incremental one. It can only realistically begin with modest arrangements for confidence-building measures, in order to build the necessary trust for more ambitious cooperative security undertakings. Effective arms control measures can only be achieved and sustained in a region where war, armed conflict, terrorism, political hostility and incitement are not features of everyday life.

Though General Assembly resolution 66/25 on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East does not fully reflect Israel's position in relation to the complexities of the nuclear issue in the region, Israel has joined the consensus on the resolution for almost 30 years. Israel has substantive reservations regarding certain elements of the resolution, in particular the modalities of achieving the goals of the resolution. Israel has acted in this way out of its belief that, instead of highlighting different positions, there is a fundamental need for building confidence and creating a common vision for all the States of the Middle East. Promotion of this vision must take into account the particular circumstances and characteristics of the Middle East and also recent transformational changes in the region. It is our view that any resolution concerning arms control, regional security or a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East should be based on consensus and emanate from arrangements freely arrived at by the States of the region.

The region of the Middle East embodies and reflects many of the arms control and disarmament challenges faced by the international community. It is no coincidence that four out of the five major violations of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons have occurred in the Middle East — in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, in Libya, Syria and Iran, while the fifth case, namely the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, has been deeply involved in nuclear proliferation to the Middle East. The nuclear activities of Iran and Syria are under continuous investigations by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), while both countries withhold cooperation and place every possible difficulty in the way of IAEA inspections and investigations. Syria has not yet declared the nuclear fuel destined for the nuclear reactor built by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Deir al Zour site and its whereabouts in Syria remain a mystery. In addition, the Middle East has seen several instances in living memory in which chemical weapons have been used by States in the region, and the Syrian chemical weapon capability continues to cause extreme concern to Israel and the region as a whole.

There is an urgent need to intensify efforts to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles to State and non-State actors in the Middle East. It is also crucial to limit the spread of nuclear fuel cycle technologies, particularly to States that are in non-compliance with their international obligations in this sphere. There is an urgent necessity for a range of international, regional and national efforts to promote more stringent controls on sensitive exports, especially to countries of concern that are engaged in proliferation activities and to those involved in supporting terrorism.

One of the most central threats today in the Middle East is Iran's hostile policies and statements, its pursuit of nuclear weapons, the aggressive development of missile technology and Iran's active involvement in supporting, supplying and training of terrorist organizations. Israel has consistently been the target of Iran's vicious anti-Semitic campaign, including statements made even in recent weeks by Iran's President calling for the elimination and destruction of Israel. It is clear that without halting and reversing the Iranian military nuclear programme, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to promote an international or regional agenda aimed at strengthening the prevailing non-proliferation regime.

Israel shares the concern of the international community pertaining to strengthening the safety and security of nuclear materials and facilities to prevent illicit trafficking. In this spirit, Israel has joined several conventions and codes of conduct in the field of nuclear safety and security. It has joined the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and has ratified the Amendment to the Convention. It has also signed the International Conveation for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. In addition, Israel is an active member of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. It has been participating in the Container Security Initiative, the Megaports Initiative (United States of America), the Second Line of Defense Core Programme, and the Global Threat Reduction Initiative, while actively supporting the Proliferation Security Initiative. Israel took part in the Nuclear Security Summits held in Washington, D.C., in 2010, and in Seoul, in 2012.

With regard to confidence-building in the sphere of regional security, Israel has positively engaged, including in the European Union seminar to "promote confidence-building and in support of a process aimed at establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and means of delivery in the Middle East", convened in Brussels, in July 2011. Israel also participated in the IAEA Director General's forum, held in November 2011, "in which participants from the Middle East and other interested parties could learn from the experience of other regions, including in the area of confidence-building" of relevance to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Israel's perspective and policy in the field of regional security and arms control has always been a pragmatic and realistic approach. It is rooted in its belief that all security concerns of regional members should be taken into account and be addressed within the regional context. The essential prerequisites to the eventual establishment of the Middle East as a mutually verifiable zone, free of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems are, inter alia, comprehensive and durable peace between the regional parties, and full compliance by all regional States with their arms control and non-proliferation obligations. The international experience has demonstrated that such a zone can only emanate from within a region, through direct negotiations between regional States. The Middle East region is no exception. No majority vote and one-sided resolutions in international forums can be a substitute for a broad regional dialogue and cooperation. As the international community has recognized, the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction should be based on arrangements freely arrived at among all States of the region in the context of stable and comprehensive peace.